

# **AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS**

## **SUPPLEMENTARY REMARKS**

### **Inquiry into Workplace Relations Amendment (Improved Protection for Victorian Workers) Bill 2002**

When the Federal Coalition Government and the Australian Democrats agreed to pass the *Workplace Relations Act*, and agreed with the Victorian Government to pass the *Commonwealth Powers (Industrial Relations) Act* in 1996 to take effect in 1997, three systems of industrial relations resulted.

Firstly, the Victorian Government retained power for industrial relations purposes over certain state employees. Secondly, the great majority of Victorians moved under the Federal system. Thirdly, Schedule 1A retained minimum employment conditions based on former Victorian conditions that were inferior to those enjoyed under the Federal system.

It was never intended that Schedule 1A workers should remain trapped there or that the number of workers in that category should grow.

According to the Victorian Minister for Industrial Relations, Schedule 1A has resulted in more than 600 000 Victorian workers being disadvantaged, and effectively operating under an inferior system.

The Workplace Relations Amendment (Improved Protection for Victorian Workers) Bill 2002 undoubtedly improves the lot of Schedule 1A workers in a number of respects.

However, anyone believing (as the Coalition and Democrats do) in the obvious virtues of uniform or unitary workplace relations conditions, can never justify the continuing retention of Schedule 1A. There is no justification whatsoever for not moving those workers under the conditions enjoyed by other Victorians under the Federal Workplace Relations Act. Transitional provisions may well be necessary to phase that in.

There is no doubt at all that the Victorian Government agrees with that proposition and it is the Federal Government which is refusing to carry through the logic and morality implicit in originally unifying the Victorian and Federal systems. That attitude is unacceptable.

It is also politically dumb because it provides a great and unfortunate incentive for the Victorian Government to try to recreate a State system.

Therefore it will be the intention of the Australian Democrats to provide or support amendments to advance the cause of full unification of the Victorian and Federal systems.

Senator Andrew Murray